The Mohegan Way

Sunburst, Year One: A Smash Success

Less than one year after its official grand opening, Project Sunburst – the expansion of Mohegan Sun into a full-service destination resort – has been a resounding success.

The $1 billion project – including a new luxury hotel, expanded gaming space, a 10,000 seat arena, 15 new restaurants and 30-plus retail outlets – is the talk of the travel industry. The star-studded Grand Opening in June attracted media attention around the world.

The expansion is also having economic benefits for Connecticut. The State reported a 24% rise in revenues from Mohegan Sun slot machines in 2002, adding another $35 million to the state budget.

"From the beginning, we envisioned Mohegan Sun as a total entertainment destination," said Mark Brown, Chairman of the Mohegan Tribal Council. "We wanted to create a place where gaming was just part of the package – where you could have a great meal, go to a concert, window shop, and stay in the best hotel room you've ever slept in. And we wanted to offer all that in a beautiful environment that celebrated the Mohegan culture and way of life."

The Mohegan Way is to live and work closely and honestly with our neighbors, and to give back to the state and community.

The Shops at Mohegan Sun.

Casino of the Sky.

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The Mohegan Tribe and the United States

Former President Bill Clinton, shown with Tribal Ambassador and Councilor Jayne Fawcett at the Grand Opening of Project Sunburst.

Before the United States was founded, the Mohegan Tribe existed as a sovereign nation. But, what does the term "sovereign" mean? In discussions about Native American tribes, and in the course of the current debate about tribal recognition, the term "sovereignty" is frequently used – and misused.

Simply, sovereignty is a term that sums up an Indian tribe's right to determine its own destiny, and to regulate its own internal affairs. As recognized in long established Federal law, a tribe is defined as a distinct political community, with the power to govern itself limited only by specific Congressional action. The U.S. Constitution affirms the sovereignty of a Federally recognized tribe.

Since 1830, and confirmed in many legal decisions since that time, U.S. law has confirmed that tribes have the right to form a government, decide their own membership, regulate property, maintain law and order, regulate commerce, and undertake many of the activities seen in state and federal government. And of course, tribes also have the right to develop economic resources, generate revenues to fund tribal activities, and act to strengthen their culture and society.

To a member of the Mohegan Tribe, sovereignty means much the same as it does to any U.S. citizen – the right to elect our own leaders, and live in our democracy without interference from foreign entities. Since the early years of our nation's legal system, federal law has recognized that tribal sovereignty pre-dates the existence of the U.S. Tribes do not exist because of federal recognition, nor by act of Congress. They existed as independent entities long before Europeans came to North America, and have the right to continue to do so today.

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The Mohegan Tribe and Connecticut

The United States Constitution provides protections against states imposing any restrictions on a tribe's activities on its own tribal land. But in the case of Connecticut's Mohegans, the Tribe has enacted laws and regulations that give tribal members many of the same privileges and obligations as all Connecticut citizens. Members of the Tribe proudly hold "triple" citizenship – as Mohegans, as Americans, and as citizens of Connecticut. In partnership with Connecticut's government, the Tribe has created a relationship that allows us to retain our central sovereign independence and provide considerable benefit to the State.

For example, tribal members pay both federal and state income taxes, as do our employees. We withhold FICA payments, as do other employers, and we conform to all IRS and Connecticut DRS rules concerning the payment of taxes on gaming earnings.

The Tribe has also agreed that Connecticut criminal law is "the law of the land" on the Mohegan reservation, and willingly works with Connecticut State Police and local law enforcement to ensure public safety. One example of this enthusiastic partnership: The cost of State Police personnel, who are on the reservation 24 hours a day to enforce Connecticut criminal statutes, is paid by the Tribe. Civil jurisdiction on the reservation is retained by the Tribe, and is administered through the Tribal Court system.

The most well-known demonstration of the Mohegan's commitment to Connecticut is the compact between the state and the Tribe signed in 1993. In that agreement, the state acknowledges tribal sovereign rights; in return, the Tribe agreed to contribute 25% of revenues generated by slot machines to the state. This agreement, in combination with the Mashantucket agreement, is the most generous revenue sharing agreement in the country. Connecticut's two casinos contribute three times as much to State budget revenues as do California's 48 Indian casinos combined.

The positive economic impact of that agreement has grown increasingly obvious over time, creating more than 10,000 jobs and generating $700 million in revenues for the state budget in six years.

Mohegan **means Wolf People, a name that goes back hundreds of years, before the tribe relocated to Connecticut in the 17th century.**

Every year at The Big E, the Tribal Cultural and Community Programs Department conducts programs about Mohegan history and traditions.

For more information about the Mohegan Way, e-mail: mweditor@moheganmail.com

A Council Committed To Caring

Giving back to the community is a top priority for the Mohegan Tribal Council, a guiding principle of The Mohegan Way. “A core belief of the Mohegan Tribe is that good fortune is something to be celebrated, but also to be shared with those who need a hand,” said Mark Brown, Chairman of the Mohegan Tribal Council.

Last year, the Mohegan Tribe quietly made significant financial contributions to organizations that help the needy, particularly in Connecticut and in the poorer parts of Indian Nation – the Native American term describing all U.S tribes.

Recording Secretary Shirley Walsh and the Tyl Middle School in Montville send gifts and needed goods to Navajo children.

Since 1994, Recording Secretary Shirley Walsh has spearheaded a campaign to supply clothing and personal items to needy tribes throughout the nation. More than 250,000 pounds of goods have been shipped.

The Council continued its emphasis on funding programs that help children, particularly in southeastern Connecticut. For example, in 2002 the Mohegan Tribe made a donation to Lawrence & Memorial Hospital in support of its Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. In addition, the Council has approved grants funding physical improvements at Montville High School, and helped the City of Norwich fund new school buses that protect children from toxic fumes.

Every year, the Council returns the Tribal Priority Allocation funds it receives from the Bureau of Indian Affairs for redistribution to needier Indian nations.

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